



# 68th IFLA Council and General Conference

## August 18-24, 2002

---

<b>Code Number:</b>	174-137-E
<b>Division Number:</b>	II
<b>Professional Group:</b>	Genealogy and Local History
<b>Joint Meeting with:</b>	-
<b>Meeting Number:</b>	137
<b>Simultaneous Interpretation:</b>	-

### ‘Wales to the world, the world to Wales’

#### **Rhidian Griffiths**

The National Library of Wales  
Aberystwyth, UK

---

It is a commonplace of life in Wales that Welsh people all know each other. More than that, when Welsh people meet, the first thing they do is to establish their respective places of origin and then go on to determine which friends and acquaintances they may have in common, and even whether they are related to one another. The Welsh mind is still tribal, and it is not unusual, particularly in Welsh-speaking Wales, to know one's second cousins as close relatives. It is, therefore, appropriate that the National Library of Wales should be represented at this meeting of the new Genealogy and Local History Section, because, as I hope to show, its contribution to the study of genealogy and local history is already significant and likely to be more so in time.

The National Library of Wales was founded in 1907, the outcome of a long struggle within Wales for national recognition and the foundation of national institutions. The vision of its founding fathers was a broad and imaginative one, and as a result the Library is unusual, if not unique, in the wide range of its collection formats. According to its royal charter of foundation, dated 19 March 1907, the Library is required to collect documentary material of all kinds relating to Wales and the Welsh, including printed and manuscript material, archival documents, portraiture and photographs; a supplementary charter of 1978 extended this broad remit to include audio-visual material, which in recent years has been widened to include sound, broadcast, film and moving image material. As a result, visitors to the Library at Aberystwyth in west Wales (always remember that Aberystwyth, not Cardiff, is the home of the National Library of Wales!) have the unusual privilege of being able to study related documents in various formats in a single location.

The Library is funded almost entirely by government grant in aid, which since 1999 has been channelled through an elected National Assembly for Wales and its executive arm, the Welsh Assembly Government. The Assembly expects all Assembly Sponsored Public Bodies (ASPBs) of which the Library is one, to respond to the Assembly's own agenda for Wales and to reflect Assembly priorities within their own corporate planning. The Library's corporate plan is reviewed and approved each year by the sponsoring ministry, in our case the Department of Culture and the Welsh Language, and, it is to be hoped, funding for the plan is forthcoming in the succeeding financial year. One of the main priorities of the National Assembly for Wales is socially inclusive policies and the attraction of more visitors, and a wider range of visitors, to publicly funded institutions. And so organisations like the Library and its sister institution, the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff, are required to consider how they may reasonably broaden their mission to embrace a wider public than the traditional, academic user. In the case of the National Library this is not a new, still less an unreal concept. In 1999 the Library issued a public consultation document, **Dewis y Dyfodol / Choosing the Future**, the response to which clearly indicated widespread support for the Library's traditional role but also an eagerness to see the Library opening its doors more widely in a literal and figurative sense by attracting new audiences to the Library building and by making available information about its collections, and examples from those collections, in digital form.

This also accorded with plans which the Library had been developing at least since the completion of its major new storage building in 1996. The augmentation of available storage by 100% allowed areas in the existing building to be freed up for other public uses. A comprehensive bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund, under the title 'The Visitor Experience', fully supported by the National Assembly, is about to bear fruit in its first phase. This will include education facilities, an interpretation and display area, a reception and shop, and a new restaurant. A second phase will see the construction of a multimedia auditorium with facilities for the showing of items from the National Screen and Sound Archive collections, and a permanent display area for some of the Library's 'treasures'. The interpretation and display area will feature themed displays which will reflect the richness and variety of the Library's collections and – it is hoped – encourage casual visitors to explore the facilities more fully. The aim will be to exhibit interesting but not necessarily glamorous items as exemplars of collections. The first theme chosen for the interpretation area is 'Migration', which will illustrate in a fairly modest way themes in the experience of Welsh people migrating from Wales and others migrating to Wales from different countries. Such a display with its overtones of family history and people movement will afford an opportunity to advertise the Library's potential as a genealogical centre as well as the attractiveness of family history research to visitors from Wales and elsewhere.

The Library like all institutions of its kind has witnessed a considerable upsurge of interest in family history and genealogy in recent years. Not only in recent years, for a newly published and authoritative history of the early years of the National Library, **A Refuge in Peace and War** by the late Dr David Jenkins, has shown that the founding fathers believed that the collection of family papers in the fledgeling Library would be important not only for social historians but also for genealogists. Nevertheless it cannot be denied that family history has become a more and more obvious plank of the Library's service. Of any 100 postal and e-mail enquiries received at least 30% will be genealogical or associated, and a significant proportion of our readers, particularly those who come from outside Wales, come to trace their ancestors. Family History is accorded a special place of its own on the Library's website, with explanations of available sources and guidance on how to use them.

The available sources are many:

As an official repository for the archives of the (disestablished Anglican) Church in Wales the Library holds a wide range of ecclesiastical records of interest to genealogists. Parish registers which include details of baptisms, marriages and burials (hatches, matches and dispatches) are held for a large number of parishes in Wales, and have been microfilmed for regular use. The Library has also published a guide to

the parish registers of Wales and their locations, which enables us to direct readers to registers not held at Aberystwyth. The Library also holds the bishops' transcripts (or summary registers) for many parishes, and marriage bonds or permissions for the period 1616-1837 when civil registration was introduced. There is an index to the marriage bonds available on the Library's website. Other diocesan records include ...

The census returns for England and Wales are held by the Public Record Office, but the Library has acquired microform copies of the returns for Wales for each census from 1841 to 1901 and part of the 1881 census on CD-ROM. Street indexes have been created in-house for some of the census returns.

Before 1858 wills were proved in the Welsh ecclesiastical courts, and the Library holds the original wills, currently being digitised.

Indexes to other information sources include the General Register Office index to births, marriages and deaths from 1837 to 1998 and the 1988 edition of the International Genealogical Index prepared by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

There are also some distinctive Welsh sources, including the St Asaph *Notitiae*, census-like returns for the diocese of St Asaph in north-east Wales for the years 1681 to 1687, an unusual source which has recently been made available on the Library's website. There is also a wide range of records for nonconformist congregations – particularly strong in Wales in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – and an in-house database which provides locations for such records held outside the Library. There is also a published guide to nonconformist records.

Because of the wide range of its holdings, the Library can also offer local newspapers, by far the largest collection in Wales, in hard copy and on microfilm; maps – particularly tithe maps, which show for the period of the tithe survey, 1836-41, not only the distribution of land but, in a separate apportionment, the names of tenants; legal, administrative and estate records; portraits and the largest public photographic collection in Wales, which includes pictures of well-known and not so well known Welsh people. In local history terms too it should be remembered that the Library is a UK legal deposit Library, and collects local history material intensively for all parts of Wales in particular.

Yet the availability of the sources is not in itself enough. The Library undertakes to answer very specific genealogical enquiries free of charge, but also provides a fee-paying service and employs for that a full-time genealogical researcher who undertakes enquiries which require searching. She now has a considerable clientele, and more work than even she, the most assiduous of staff members, can reasonably cope with without some weeks' delay in responding to enquirers. It is clear that family history research is here to stay, and will form an important part not only of the Library's services, but also become an important bridge to a growing and different audience from the traditional 'catchment area' of a national library. So many who have taken up family history are unused to using research sources and indeed research libraries, and therefore are the very people whom we and our paymasters interested in social inclusion wish to attract to the Library. Those new to family and local history need more and better guidance than we can at present give them. Accordingly the Library is formulating plans for the development of a Family History Centre, based on an extension of our current services. Much of the original material held by the Library has been placed on microfilm and material acquired from elsewhere has been obtained in microform from other repositories. This material forms a large proportion of family history sources, and is consulted at present in a designated area within the North Reading Room. The first step to the development of the Centre will be the transference of this existing microform reading facility to a refurbished reading area on the south side of the building which currently houses a map room. The new South Reading Room will bring together manuscripts, maps and microforms in one large, secure reading area. The Library's Corporate Plan includes a bid to the Welsh Assembly Government for funding to begin the development of the Centre through the provision of additional materials and experienced staff to

give guidance and advice to family history researchers. It is not our intention to make the Centre a separate block within our reading services. For reasons I have tried to outline, the Library has many sources in various formats which will assist genealogists, But we hope that by providing staff support and access to an ever-widening range of sources, we can build up a 'virtual centre'. The number of digital sources is increasing steadily as the Library's digitisation programme is further developed. Of great importance too will be the links with other available online sources, and – most important – the accessibility of the 'centre' to searchers from outside. It is hoped to commission a feasibility study which will look at the potential for the development of a web-based guide to family history in Wales, linked to the Library's own services and those of local record offices in Wales, in much the same way as the Library itself is linked to the family records website developed by the Public Record Office. This can be further linked with the services being developed by the Wales Tourist Board which will allow people from all over the world who wish to trace their familial links with Wales to plan their visit and their family history search strategy.

Such a development, if it can be brought about as we hope, will be part of the Library's ongoing programme of introducing itself to a wider audience, encouraging access to its collections, and encouraging their use to meet the needs of researchers of all kinds. It is part of our mission to bring the world to Wales and Wales to the world.